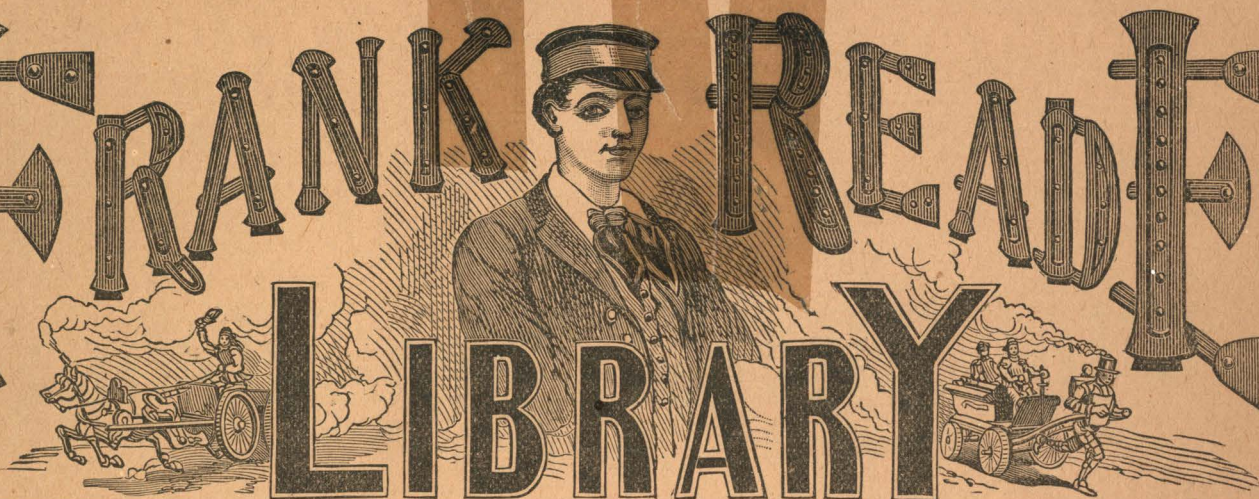


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The Black Squadron;

Or, Frank Reade, Jr., in the Indian Ocean With His Submarine Boat, the "Rocket."

By "NONAME."



"You have, sir," cried Frank, heartily; "and it shall be righted." "That you say, sir. "But you are not the President of the United States." "No," replied the consul; "but he represents the Secretary of the Navy, and has been dispatched here with his submarine boat to deal harshly with the Black Squadron."

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The Black Squadron;

OR,

FRANK READE, JR., IN THE INDIAN OCEAN WITH HIS SUBMARINE BOAT, THE "ROCKET."

A TALE OF THE DEEP SEA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Black Mogul," "Below the Sahara," "In White Latitudes," "The Lost Navigators," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A NAVAL PROBLEM.

AMERICAN and foreign ship owners had made complaints to their governments of outrages visited upon their vessels in certain parts of the Indian Ocean by what had become famous among sea-faring men as a mysterious coterie of vessels, by their color and character known as the Black Squadron.

The American Secretary of the Navy was exceedingly surprised.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded; "from the description given me I should think that Blackbeard, Captain Kidd or some of those old time buccaneers had returned to the sea once more, to fill the merchant service with terror."

"Indeed, Mr. Secretary," said Captain Cicero Bumstead, of the merchant vessel Red Swan, "it is no chimera. Such a thing as the Black Squadron does exist, and there are hundreds of captains can testify to being overhauled by it in waters anywhere north of Mozambique Channel."

"Tut, tut! that is piracy!" exclaimed the secretary in surprise; "if it was farther north, in China seas, I would not be surprised. But the Indian Ocean has been free from pirates for twenty-five years at least."

"Nevertheless, the Black Squadron sails the Indian Ocean," persisted Captain Bumstead.

"Well, I must say that this is all very surprising," continued the secretary. "Who is the leader of the pirates? How many vessels have they, and what are their methods? Do they go armed?"

"To begin with your first question," answered the captain, "nobody knows who the leader is. As to the number of vessels, I should say there were half a dozen. They are not large, being more of the dhow type. They are well armed, and carry rifled cannon. Their method is to surround a merchant vessel, fire a shot across her bows and then board her."

"Why, this is serious," exclaimed the secretary, "it must be looked into at once. Have any vessels been sunk by these latter-day pirates?"

"Nobody can say. At least two are missing, which it is possible were sunk by the wretches. But generally the vessel is allowed to go on her way after delivering up her money and valuable, but not bulky parts of her cargo."

"What are the pirates? Natives of Madagascar or the east coast?"

"That is not known. They come aboard most effectually masked, even wearing gloves, so that not even the color of their skin can be seen!"

The secretary made some copious notes and then said:

"We will despatch the Cruiser Tennessee thither at once. If she can once sight this famous Black Squadron—I think that its career will be exceedingly brief."

"Thank you for the merchant service," said Captain Bumstead. Then he withdrew and took a late train for New York.

True to his word, the Secretary sent a cruiser to Mozambique. She was in the Indian Ocean for a whole year.

Twenty different times she sighted the Black Squadron, but was never able to get within gunshot. There were so many shallow bays, straits and atolls, into which the light draft vessels could vanish, that it was like trying to hunt down a will-o'-the-wisp, for the big cruiser could only make headway in deep seas.

So that while one vessel was leading the Tennessee an elusive chase among the shallow straits, the others were holding up some passing vessel far out to sea.

Nothing was gained, and the commander of the Tennessee finally had to go back to Cape Town to coal up. This left the Mozambique pirates victorious.

The Secretary was very angry, and called the Tennessee home, giving the commander a general hauling over; but it was of no use.

He told a straight story corroborated by his crew, and the Secretary could see the real difficulties.

"I tell you that only a light draught boat can catch the rascals," declared the commander, "and even then, their familiarity with the channels might beat it."

"But something must be done!" said the Secretary, desperately.

"You may retire, Prescott. I will see you again in a few days!"

Then the Secretary turned to his desk and wrote on a pad of white paper:

"MR. FRANK READE, JR., Readestown,

"DEAR SIR,—To what class does your submarine boat belong? Does it carry armament, and can you navigate shallow seas? If so, would you charter it to the United States Government for a brief service in the Indian Ocean? Hoping that you are sufficiently true to the interests of your country to be willing to accept a contract of this sort, I await your answer.

"SECRETARY UNITED STATES NAVY,
Washington, D. C."

Two hours later a reply to the telegram came. Thus it read:

"READESTOWN, June, 189—

"Secretary, U. S. Navy.

"DEAR SIR:—Yours received. I stand ready at all times to yield my interests and my life for the preservation of my country. What sort of service do you expect me to render? I will call at your office to-morrow.

"FRANK READE, JR."

The Secretary's face shone with delight as he read this message.

"The problem is solved!" he muttered, "this fellow with his submarine boat can surely hunt those pirates down successfully. He may perhaps be induced now to sell the secret of that dynamite gun of his to the government."

And the worthy official chuckled as he thought how much cheaper it would be for the U. S. to charter this submarine boat with its dead-

ly armament, than to send another cruiser out into those far-off seas. Meanwhile, Frank Reade, Jr. was speeding on his way to Washington by a night train. He could only conjecture what service the Secretary of the Navy might require of him. But he felt sure that it must be urgent else he would not have sent for him.

At noon he reached the capital. After a dinner at the Ebbitt House, he proceeded at once to the secretary's office. That worthy was awaiting him, and extended a cordial greeting.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Reade," said the secretary. "I have long known you by reputation. I believe our experts have a number of times tried to negotiate with you for the secret of your electric gun."

"That is true enough," replied the young inventor, frankly, "and I have felt compelled to refuse."

"But why should you? Every true American should be willing to at least sell to his government any advantage of that kind which contributes to her power of defense."

"I would gladly give it to my government, were it a time of need," replied Frank, "but the U. S. is not at war."

"Yet she, like other nations, has to stand always ready."

"When she is attacked, then you will find myself and all my inventions at her service. Until such time I claim the right of an American citizen to hold my secret."

"Oh, certainly; that is all right. But this is not the subject I called you here to discuss. It is of far greater importance."

"Indeed! In what manner can I serve?"

With this the Secretary told the story of the Black Squadron, and the ineffectual attempt of the Tennessee to cope with it.

Frank listened with deepest interest.

"Now," said the Secretary, "you understand our position. Uncle Sam has no craft that can pursue those pirates among the shoals of that part of the Indian Ocean."

"And you wish to enlist my submarine boat for that purpose?"

"Exactly."

Frank's face was inscrutable. He was silent for some moments. "I am not sure that I am equal to the undertaking," he said.

"What if I should fail?"

"You cannot do worse than the captain of the Tennessee. We will take all chances on that score."

After some moments the secretary continued:

"In regard to remuneration, you may call upon Uncle Sam for what you choose."

"No, sir!" replied Frank, emphatically, "I will exact no fee! If there is any remuneration which I will stoop to take, it may come from the prize vessels captured. I am wealthy and if I should conclude to undertake this matter, I shall do it for pure love of adventure and the rendering of a service to my country. No more."

"You are indeed patriotic, Mr. Reade," said the secretary, admiringly; "that is generous. But you shall have your own way. When may I expect an answer?"

Frank rose from his chair.

"Within forty-eight hours," he replied. "I will wire you."

"Very good! I shall be on the anxious seat until then and hope that your answer may be favorable."

A few moments later Frank was being driven rapidly to the railway station to get a train to Readestown.

We next find the young inventor in his private office in that thriving little city, industriously engaged in studying some maps. Here he spent a whole half day.

Then he arose with a decisive manner and touched a bell. Instantly a door opened and on the threshold stood a genuine specimen of Celt, red hair, broad mug and all.

"Is it me yez want, sor?"

"Yes, Barney," replied the young inventor, "both you and Pomp. Where is the black rascal?"

"Ise heah, sah!" piped a shrill voice behind Barney and a comical specimen of the coon appeared to view. He bowed and scraped profusely.

"Well, you jolly rascals!" cried the young inventor, cheerily. "I've got some news for you!"

Barney turned a somersault then and there and Pomp stood on his head.

"All roight, sor!"

"Ki-yi, sah!"

"Hold up there! None of those antics!" cried Frank, "there is work ahead for you. I want you to get the Rocket ready at once for a long cruise. It will be many a day before we see the shores of America again and there will be tough fighting before us!"

CHAPTER II.

EN ROUTE.

"WHURROO!" cried Barney. "Shure that's the koin'd of talk! I'm glad to hear it, Misther Frank, and yez kin be shure that all will be ready to wanst."

"Good!" said Frank. "I want supplies put aboard the Rocket for a two years' cruise. There must be plenty of ammunition and arms."

"A'right, sah!"

Then the two jokers paused a moment and looked expectant.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Frank in surprise.

"Sure, sor—axin' yure pardon, sor—but mebbe yez wouldn't moind tellin' us—"

"What?"

"Phwere we be goin' sor."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank with a laugh. "Your curiosity must be satisfied. Well, we shall cruise in the Indian Ocean."

"That's a mighty long ways off, sor."

"Yes, it's a good ways, and you'll see plenty of excitement before you get through, for we shall run up against a gang of pirates, no doubt."

"Pirates, sor?"

Barney whistled and Pomp rolled his eyes. Their surprise was comical.

"Yes, the real thing."

Barney said no more, but still whistling, made a motion to Pomp. Then both vanished like automatons. Frank could not help a laugh. But his first move was to write a dispatch, which was worded as follows:

"SECRETARY OF NAVY, Washington, D. C.

"The submarine boat Rocket will leave for Mozambique within three days. Will try to settle accounts with the Black Squadron.

"Yours ever,

"FRANK READE, JR."

So the die was cast. The young inventor had decided to go upon his perilous mission, and no time was lost in making the start.

The Rocket was a wonderful bit of marine construction. Frank had departed from his usual lines, and had built a craft which to all appearances was a vessel of war.

At the time he had actually thought of paying a visit of exploration to the China Sea, and along the Malay coast, where pirates were plentiful. But the predicament of the U. S., as regarded the Black Squadron, had given him just the opportunity he desired.

The Rocket was a steel vessel, built somewhat upon the lines of a monitor. Her hull was light, and not proof to a cannon shot, but this Frank had not deemed necessary, as she was able to travel under water.

Her deck was wide and open, and protected by guard rails. Three turrets arose from it, one of which served as the pilot-house.

All of these turrets were made to turn upon a pivot. In the main or large turret, were two electric dynamite guns.

These were not heavy, being nothing more than cylinders of thin steel, provided with air chambers, for expelling the shell of dynamite by pneumatic compression, and making no report in the discharge. But the shells were capable of terrible destruction.

The after turret contained but one smaller gun. This was the complete armament of the vessel. Two strong steel masts rose from each turret and formed really the pivot on which they turned.

To sink the Rocket it was simply necessary to open a valve in each side of the hull, near the keel. Water at once rushed into a chamber there which caused the boat to go down to any depth desired, this being regulated by the steel drum inside the tank or chamber. This drum was made to recede as the water entered, or to press down into the chamber and expel the water to make the boat rise.

The Rocket could travel faster, of course, on the surface, but yet was capable of a fair rate of speed under water.

Each port hole, through which the cannon protruded, was enveloped in folds of flexible rubber. The guns being breech loading, were provided with automatic caps to fit over the muzzle, while the gun was being reloaded, to prevent water from entering the boat.

The doors and windows could be in an instant pneumatically sealed. All this wonderful mechanism was easily operated from the pilot house where there was an electric keyboard.

The Rocket was furnished with twin screws driven by powerful electric engines. The storage system was Frank Reade, Jr.'s, own invention and a secret.

But perhaps as wonderful a feature as any, was the remarkably ingenious device for furnishing the boat with fresh air while she was under water.

This was accomplished by means of chemical generators and diffusing pipes with valves which were carried to every part of the boat. Thus the deep sea voyagers could remain an indefinite length of time in the depths.

The cabins of the boat were richly furnished. The staterooms were comfortable and the galley over which Pomp presided was well arranged.

In fact no detail had been overlooked. Altogether the Rocket was a floating "symposium," to use the expression of one spectator.

It was Barney and Pomp's duty to place the necessary stores and supplies aboard the Rocket. Men were busily engaged in this all that day.

The Rocket rested just now in a tank or basin of water in the big yard of the machine works. This was connected by a gate and lock with a canal leading down to the river and thence to the sea.

When the day came for the start, Frank with Barney and Pomp went aboard the Rocket.

The young inventor might have taken a larger crew, but he did not deem it necessary. Workmen opened the big gate and the boat glided into the canal.

A great crowd of people were gathered on the river banks, and they cheered as the boat glided by. Frank displayed the American flag, and then Readestown gradually sank out of sight.

Down the river to the sea went the submarine boat.

Frank had no desire as yet to try a sail under water. The Rocket had been tested and had proved herself all right, so he was satisfied.

Down the river she glided and in due course came to the sea. Once

out upon the blue waters the voyagers felt as if the journey was really begun.

Barney and Pomp were in hilarious spirits.

Nothing suited them any better than to embark thus with Frank Reade, Jr., upon some wonderful voyage of discovery and adventure. In all his travels they had been his companions.

"Be me sowl, naygur!" cried Barney as he lashed the wheel and went down into the cabin where Pomp was at work, "do yez know yez for all the world make me think av a dhirty collar!"

"Wha' dat, chile?" sniffed Pomp. "Wha' yo' fink dat, sah?"

"Bekase yez made to be done up."

"Huh!" sniffed the coon, "you' ain't de chap kin do dat, sah."

"Bejabbers, I think I kin."

"Does yo' know wha' I fink ob yo'?"

"Phwat, sor?"

"Golly! I fink you'se a faded flowah, sah—a wilted blossom, sah."

"Yez do?"

"Ya, I does."

"Mebbe yez kin tell me why?"

"I kin dat."

"Well, phwy thin?"

"Bekase youse need to be plucked."

Barney spat on his hands.

"A mon who wud spring sich a chestnut as that," he roared, "ain't no bizness on this earth. Shure git off it!"

And he made a swipe at the coon. If Pomp had got that crack he might have fell.

Deluded Irishman!

The coon was on the lookout and dodged the blow neatly. At the same moment he took a little run and gently planted his cranium in the abdominal region in the Celt's anatomy.

So forcible was the collision that Barney sat down out of breath. But he grappled with his adversary.

Then the same old story.

Over and over the two jokers rolled in a lively rough and tumble. Neither seemed to get the advantage.

And they panted and tugged and scrambled around until they were so completely exhausted that they could scrap no more.

At the same time there came a loud call from Frank.

"Barney, where are you?"

"Comin' sor."

"On deck lively!"

"All roight, sor!"

And with a parting jab at the coon, Barney rushed up the stairs. Frank Reade, Jr., was at the forward rail with a glass.

The Rocket was gliding along through a dead calm sea. Far out on the horizon two schooners, under bare poles, were seen.

But beyond them, where sky and sea seemed to meet, was a spectacle which caused Barney to stare. Great yellow clouds were racing up toward the zenith.

"Do you see?" cried Frank. "A big hurricane is making up over there."

"Be me sowl, I should say so!" cried the Celt. "Shure, we'd better kape an eye out, Misther Frank."

"Oh, we're all right," declared the young inventor, "but those schooners will have a hard one."

"Yez are roight."

Frank knew that they could easily avoid the storm by going under the surface, but the two sailing vessels must ride it out.

They might be able to do so under bare poles. But they must be stanch vessels for that.

For the hurricane was one of unusual bad appearance, and would strike hard. In fact, if a vessel was not in the best of condition, it would be apt to go to the bottom at the first shock.

So the submarine voyagers could not help but watch the appearance of the storm with intense interest. For a time they remained out on deck.

Then Frank said:

"Into the pilot house; quick!"

They sprang into the forward turret. Frank pressed a button, and instantly the windows and doors were closed.

Then they saw the great rushing wall of water strike the schooners. For a moment they were pitched onto their beam ends.

Then the submarine boat was lifted as if with giant hands, and hurled into the trough of the sea. For a moment it seemed as if she must be destroyed.

CHAPTER III.

AT CAPE TOWN.

But Frank Reade, Jr., had already pressed the tank lever back, and now the boat settled in the waves and suddenly plunged down through them.

In a few moments she was out of the mad whirl and steady as a clock. Then Frank pressed another button.

This flooded the boat and the sea about with the electric light, and it was easy to see the bottom far below.

For the sea at this point was not extremely deep. However, the Rocket was low enough not to feel the motion of the waves above.

And while the awful storm was thundering and booming over their heads, the submarine voyagers were safe.

Frank let the boat descend to within a few feet of the bottom. The scene presented was a remarkable one.

The search-light lit up a pathway for many hundred feet.

Across this darted myriads of fish of all kinds and sizes. There were literal forests of seaweed and grottoes of coral and slimy rock. It was a strange and unusual scene.

Barney and Pomp amused themselves with studying the various forms of submarine life. Suddenly the Celt espied a huge object to the right.

"Be me sowl!" he cried, "if that ain't a sunken ship thin I don't know phwat I'm talkin' about! Shure it's nothin' else!"

"Golly! yo' am right, I'ish!" cried Pomp; "dat's jes' wha' it am!"

"Misther Frank!" cried Barney.

"Well," replied Frank.

"Wud yez cast yure eye over here, sor; shure here is a ship!"

"A ship!" exclaimed Frank, as he instinctively thought of the two schooners. "Where is she, Barney?"

"Yender, sir!"

Frank saw a huge hulk lying half buried in the sand and masses of seaweed.

A glance was enough.

The high poop, low deck amidships and heavy bow, told him that the hulk was an old timer and had probably been lying here for a hundred years. She was doubtless some merchantman or perhaps an old frigate.

The young inventor drew a deep breath of relief.

"That is an old one, Barney," he declared; "probably she was sunk in some storm a century ago."

"Begorra mebbe there's gold aboard her!" declared the Celt.

"Pehaw!" exclaimed Frank, "don't you believe that. What gold she may have carried is probably so corroded as to be of no value now."

"Then yez won't try to go aboard av her, sor, wid yer divin' suits?"

"No," replied Frank. "I intend to stay here until the storm is spent. Then we will go to the surface."

"All roight, sor!"

And Frank proceeded to carry out this plan. After some time he consulted the indicator in the pilot house, and cried:

"The storm is over!"

"Whurroo!" cried Barney.

With this Frank touched the tank lever and the boat began to rise. Up she went and suddenly burst into daylight.

The sun was shining and the sea was rolling in long swells. But the hurricane was past.

Instinctively Frank looked about for the two schooners. Far to leeward he saw the dark hull of a drifting craft.

And he saw even at that distance that her mast had gone by the board and that she was in distress. At once he shouted to Barney.

"Steer for that vessel as straight as you can. Be lively!"

The Celt obeyed.

The submarine boat shot away across the sea. Swiftly she ran down upon the drifting schooner.

And as they drew nearer our voyagers could see the crew trying to cut away the hamper of the rigging. If this could be cleared perhaps the schooner's leak caused by her listing might be stopped.

The sailors seemed to stop work at sight of the submarine boat and for a while were half inclined to desert their post. But finally they were ordered back to work by their captain.

While a hail came across the water to the Rocket.

"Ahoy!"

Frank went to the forward rail.

"Ahoy!"

"What craft are you?"

"The submarine boat Rocket."

"Are you a Yankee?"

"Every time!"

"Well, so are we," was the reply; "this is the schooner Eri King, of Nantucket. We were hit by the gale."

"I should say so. What can I do to help you?"

"Stand by to help us sheer off this hamper—we are sinking."

"Ay, ay!" replied Frank; "we'll help you all we can!"

With which Frank ran the bow of the Rocket up close to the hull of the listed schooner. Then all three went out on the extreme bow and began to cut away at the rigging.

So lustily did all work now that suddenly the schooner righted. The hamper was towed astern.

Then the crew flew to the pumps. In a short while the schooner was easy.

Then they rigged jury masts and reclaimed much valuable material from the floating hamper. All of which being done, the Rocket now cut away from the schooner.

Her captain, a tall Yankee, stood in the bow and thanked the submarine voyagers for their assistance. After which the Rocket sped away.

This was the only incident worthy of note for a week. Then the New Hebrides was sighted and the course of the Rocket was changed more to the east. Down the Irish coast she crept on her way, and then southward toward Teneriffe.

It would be hardly worth while to note any of the adventures of our voyagers until Cape Town was reached.

Here Frank put in for water, and the Rocket was anchored right among all the grand war-ships of the Powers, a fleet of which was present.

The submarine boat instantly attracted attention. The officers of the various vessels began to water and to make comments.

"Confounded Yankee!" grunted one English captain. "I would ask nothing better than to try one of my rifled cannon upon her!" "If that is a sample of Uncle Sam's navy," growled a Russian commander, "I can say that I don't think much of it. Insignificant craft!"

Thus the comments went around; but none of the egotistical commanders once dreamed that those slender guns peeping from the thin turrets could blow any one of their big cruisers out of the waters of the bay.

But such was the truth.

As it happened, this day there was to be a contest at target shooting in the open sea.

All the gilt buttoned and belaced naval commanders had got together and arranged the programme. Big prizes were to be offered.

There were in the harbor two English men-o'-war, one Italian, two Spanish, a Russian and two French cruisers. All were ships of a high class and protected with armor.

The terms of the target practice were as follows:

The target should consist of a dismantled hulk tendered by the citizens of Cape Town. The distance would be two miles in the open sea, and two shots were allowed to each vessel from any rifled gun that they had in battery. Of course prizes would go to the best marksmen.

Barney and Pomp had heard of the programme while on shore. They came back and told Frank about it.

The young inventor's eyes kindled. He was feeling something of a slight, as in entering the harbor he had saluted the squadron of war vessels, but had been coldly ignored. The United States flag was decidedly in the minority.

So it occurred to him that here was an excellent opportunity to teach these autocrats of the Navy a bit of a lesson. He at once rowed ashore.

The entry list was at the office of the collector of the port. Frank went there and entered the Rocket in the competition for the prize.

The spruce officer who had charge of the list said in Spanish:

"You are late, señor! We anticipated no more entries, so have already drawn lots for the order of shooting. I fear your battery will be the last to fire!"

"That will suit me all the better," said Frank, imperturbably. "I would much rather shoot last."

The Spanish officer stared at him, and then winked knowingly to a subordinate. But Frank had already left the office.

He went back on board the Rocket. Later in the day a boat came from the cruiser Hispaniola, and the pompous commanding officer came alongside. He scanned the Rocket closely, and then said:

"Your battery is light, señor!"

"Yes," replied Frank; "not as heavy as yours!"

"Will your guns throw two miles?"

"Easily!"

The Spaniard stared.

"Well," he said, "you were just in time to get your entry in. If you had been a little later—"

"Well?" said Frank, sharply; "what of that?"

"You would have been ruled out, as your craft is hardly large enough to figure in such a test."

"Indeed," said Frank, coldly. "I would not be so particular about entering the contest, were it not for the glorious opportunity it will afford me to beat the whole crew of you swelled-up navymen. And I shall do it!"

The Spaniard laughed cynically.

"Perdieu!" he exclaimed. "You Americans have great confidence. But it does not always win!"

"I am going to take my chances," said Frank, coolly.

"Can your government not show heavier armament?" sneered the Spaniard.

"It is not necessary, sir," replied Frank; "the weight of armament does not always determine its power. Look to your own chances and Uncle Sam will look to his."

The Spanish officer laughed half derisively. Then his boat moved away. It was very plain that the diminutive craft flying the American colors was held in utter contempt by the whole squadron.

"Begorra, an' phwat did that yaller blatherskite have to say?" asked Barney.

Frank repeated the conversation. Both Barney and Pomp were aroused.

"Be me sowl I hope yez will beat thim all, Misther Frank!" declared the Celt.

"We will certainly do our best," said the young inventor, with a quiet smile.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TARGET SHOOT.

BUT the Spanish boat had barely vanished when a small launch was seen approaching. It flew the flag of Great Britain.

As it ranged alongside Frank returned the salute of a bewhiskered officer on her forward deck.

"Is that the Rocket?" was the query in a pompous tone.

"It is!" replied Frank.

"You are entered in the competitive target shoot?"

"I am."

"I have come to inform you that all vessels must report on the line within one hour. You are the last on the list."

"Very good!" replied Frank; "I will be there. What ship is yours?"

"H. M. S. Terrifier," was the reply.

Then the launch moved away a few yards but suddenly came about. The bewhiskered officer again hailed:

"Aho, Rocket!"

"Aho," replied Frank.

"You are a chartered vessel, you say?"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"For what purpose has Uncle Sam chartered you?"

Frank paused a moment. The impertinence of the blunt question angered him, but he finally decided to reply:

"We are on our way to the Indian Ocean to exterminate the Black Squadron of pirates. That is our mission!"

"So?" cried the British officer with what seemed insolent surprise; "then we are both on the same errand. However, we will not stoop to competition?"

"There will hardly be need of that," replied Frank, coolly.

"Do you think your craft heavy enough to give battle to the pirates? You can't carry a very heavy crew!"

"I think we can give a good account of ourselves!" replied Frank. "You will have a chance to decide. We may meet in the Indian Ocean. An Revoir!"

The British launch steamed away and Frank could hear the derisive laughter and comments from the deck. The young inventor smiled grimly.

"Maybe we can give them a surprise!" he said coolly. "We will see!"

The big war vessels were now moving out to the firing line. They made an imposing display with their fields of bunting and highly polished brass work.

The two English vessels led the way, the Italian came next, the Russian next, and the French and Spanish followed.

Behind all the little Rocket crept along. The harbor was now filled with excursion vessels, and when it was seen what a diminutive representative the United States had the Cape Town people were surprised, and many laughed.

The sea outside was quite rough, and the big war vessels pitched and tossed badly. It required all the power of their engines to keep them in line.

Far out on the ocean was the anchored hulk, and at the distance it was indeed a very small mark.

To hit it fair and plump at that distance and in that sea must show fine marksmanship. But all the crews were confident.

"Be me sowl!" exclaimed Barney as he studied the distant target, "it looks to me as if there'd be mighty little left av the target after they've all had a shot at it, sor!"

"Very good!" said Frank. "Then we shall be spared the trouble of a trial. The first vessel to blow the hulk out of the water gets the prize. They may hit it many times without doing that."

Interest now was at fever height. A flag ran up from the steamer on which were the judges of the contest.

It was the signal for action to begin. The first vessel to the line was the Terrifier.

The St. George cross floated proudly at her peak as the big British vessel cut the line.

Her starboard battery was open, and as she heeled the line one of her guns was instantly trained, and the next moment a deafening roar filled the air.

All eyes were upon the target.

For an instant there was a hush. Then a great shout went up.

Far beyond the hulk a great white column rose out of the sea. The Terrifier had overshot the mark.

The rough sea was no doubt responsible for this. But there was another trial.

Round again came the big vessel, and her forward turret gun was the one tried this time. When at just the right angle it was fired.

Again air and water shook, and then in the distance the air was seen filled with splintered wood. One of the masts of the hulk was shot away.

The Terrifier had failed.

With much chagrin her commander, cursing the heavy sea, withdrew to the rear. The British Vanguard, a smaller vessel, came next.

But she had even worse luck.

One of her shots fell short, and the second went a hundred yards wide. The flag of England was in hard luck.

The next vessel to the line was the French steamer La Reine. She was a very beautiful specimen of naval architecture.

One of her shots carried away the mizzen topmast, and the other just grazed the stern of the hulk. The La Reine was loudly cheered. Her sister cruiser, the Versailles, was next.

The Versailles' first shot went far wide. The next carried away the bowsprit. This was close shooting.

But the hulk yet lived. However, the Italian Vendetta now came to the mark. King Humbert's sailors were in fine fettle and plumped a shell straight through the hull of the anchored vessel. But she did not seem much the worse. The Vendetta's second shot fell short.

It was now Spain's turn. The proud flag of the Dons appeared on

the line. The Isabella fired two hopeless shots neither coming within a hundred yards of the mark.

The Infanta next toed the mark and succeeded in placing one of her shots under the hulk's stern. She quivered and her wood was shattered. But yet she floated.

The Spaniards let out a wild yell. But so far the contest had developed no good marksmanship.

Put the Nicolavitch, Russian war-ship, now had her turn. Twice she fired. One shot went over the mark half a mile. The other clipped the schooner's bow.

Sixteen shots from the most powerful of rifled cannon had not sufficed to sink the obdurate schooner. This was a most humiliating reflection.

And now went up to the masthead of the judges' ship the U. S. flag. This was a signal for the Rocket.

All eyes were turned upon the diminutive little craft as she sailed under the stern of the Terrifier and approached the line.

A shout of derisive laughter went up. That the mighty nation of the United States should be represented in so insignificant a manner seemed to them ludicrous.

Barney was at the wheel and as Frank gave the orders brought the submarine boat to the line. Frank was at one of the guns in the main turret.

The sea was rough and the little boat pitched terribly. The young inventor, however, coolly placed a shell in the cylinder.

Every eye in the fleet was upon the insignificant "yacht" as she was called. They saw the thin cylinder protrude from the turret.

"There goes the pop-gun," said one of the Terrifier's crew; "they'll smother a mosquito somewhere on the way!"

A roar of laughter went up. It could be plainly heard aboard the Rocket. It made Barney mad.

"Give it to them in the eye, Mlster Frank!" he cried. "Show them how an Irishman kin shoot!"

"I'll show them how a Yankee, as well as an Irishman, can shoot," laughed Frank, who was as nonchalant as if about to light a cigar.

"Two points north, Barney. Now steady!"

Frank's keen eye was on the sights. Now the little boat rose on a swell. The calculation was made to a nicety.

The young inventor touched the electric button. There was a sharp hiss, a click, and a slight recoil. But no report.

The crews of the various war ships were looking for the burst of flame from the gun's muzzle, but it did not come.

Nor did they know of the discharge, until there came to their ears a distant roar like booming thunder. Then they beheld an appalling spectacle.

The dynamite projectile had struck the schooner just at the water line. In an instant there was a fearful upheaval.

The dynamite tore its way through the hulk, and rent the vessel to bits, which were carried up in a mound of water and debris. When this settled, the horizon line was clear. The target was gone.

One silent, deadly shot from the Yankee craft had won the prize. For a few moments not one of the spectators could find voice.

There was no applause, yet there was no derision. The entire squadron was stricken dumb with the inexplicable wonderment of the thing.

Then they recalled the fact that for a hundred years and more past, the Americans had been in the habit of contributing just such startling feats to the annals of fame. They remembered that the Yankee was always undefeated on land or sea.

Again his so-called "ingenuity" had set at naught their best talents and genius. With his insignificant little boat and his shell of a gun, Frank Reade, Jr., had given them the greatest surprise of their lives.

Their powerful warships could never hope to cope for a moment with this submarine boat which could sail under them and blow them into perdition with no reprisal. It was a stunning realization.

And to add to the force of his victory, Frank saluted the judges' ship and then plunged the Rocket under the water.

A few seconds later it appeared right under the bow of the Terrifier and circled her once. Then it vanished only to shoot out from under the stern of the Nicolavitch.

Thus, like a diving duck, the Rocket played about the fleet. The last time up, Frank sent a projectile far out to see, where it raised a mountain of green water.

This ended the exhibition and the Rocket returned to her anchorage, far outstripping every vessel in.

Slowly and silently the war-ships and the harbor craft came in. They were hardly able to realize that the prize had been captured by the Yankee "yacht!"

That night a big reception was held aboard the Terrifier, and an invitation was sent to the commander of the Rocket.

Frank attended of course, and was publicly awarded the prize. He became at once the lion of the hour.

"There's no getting around it," said the commander of the big British vessel. "You Yankees beat the world. Why, with that diving boat of yours you could destroy a whole fleet of vessels like ours!"

"That is true!" agreed Frank.

"How long can you remain under water?"

"For weeks if I choose!"

"Well," said the British admiral with a shrug of his shoulders, "I sincerely hope our country will never get into a war with America!"

"I hope so also!" replied Frank. "America would like to see the world always at peace!"

"But this boat of yours—of course you cannot hope to keep the secret of its construction—other countries will yet duplicate it!"

"Perhaps so," said Frank with a smile, "they may even excel it. But they have not done so yet. Before they can duplicate it, however, they must know the secret of its electric storage, the mechanism of the dynamite gun and many other things. No nation on earth can ever buy that knowledge from me!"

CHAPTER V.

AT MOZAMBIQUE.

FRANK learned that beside the two British vessels, France and Italy had sent their men-of-war to that part of the world to hunt down the Black Squadron.

Frank told the commanders at once of the unsuccessful efforts of the Tennessee.

This put a new face on matters.

"You have just the craft to hunt them down with, Monsieur Reade," said the French captain. "You can go in shoal water or deep—under or over. Yours is the big advantage."

"Yes," agreed Frank, "that is very true. For that reason the Secretary of the United States Navy chartered the Rocket."

"What? Does not your government own the secret of this boat?"

"No, sir; it is mine."

This astonished the naval officers.

"Why, in my country," said the Italian captain, "a man would be put on the rack if he refused to render such a secret to his government."

"And in France also."

Frank smiled.

"In that respect America is the best country in the world!" he declared; "it is a land of free speech and free action. It is the home of the free!"

The naval officers listened to this announcement with interest. They did not dispute it.

"We always listen with respect to any man's defense of his native land," said the French captain, gracefully.

The next day the Rocket left Cape Town. She carried the two-mile target prize with her.

Around the Cape of Good Hope she made her way, and kept on up the east coast.

The next stopping place was at Pietermaritzburg, the capital of Natal, where a brief visit was made.

Then Frank made his course for Mozambique. This was a port on the African coast, two-thirds of the way up the channel.

Many vessels were met on the way, and the little Rocket was a general object of curiosity. But none suspected her identity or her errand.

When Mozambique was reached Frank called upon the American Consul. He stated the object of his quest and instantly found a long category of the evil doings of the Black Squadron.

"Why, it will soon be unsafe for any vessel of our nation to venture into the Indian Ocean unarmed or without escort," declared the consul; "this gang of pirates are getting bolder every day!"

"Well," said Frank, "we will try and make it interesting for them, if such a thing is possible."

"I am glad that the secretary has sent a light draught vessel out here," said the consul. "The Tennessee could do absolutely nothing."

Just then there was a commotion outside the door. Then it burst open and a number of men of the seafaring type burst in.

It was easy to see that they were Americans. Their leader was a broad-shouldered man with an open, honest countenance.

"Begging your pardon, gentlemen," he said, with a profound bow, "but is the American Consul in?"

"I am the consul," replied that worthy.

"Then I pay you my respects, sir," said the seaman. "I am skipper of the brig Mary Lee, and my name is Thomas Main, sir. We sailed from Boston eight months ago with a cargo for Hong Kong."

"Well, Captain Main, what can I do for you?"

"With due respect, sir, I fear not much. But I thought best to report to you, sir, that the black-hearted pirates came aboard of us off Madagascar, and looted our ship."

The consul shot a glance at Frank.

"Another case," he said; "the fifth one this week. What was the value of the property taken from you, Captain Main?"

"Gold and silver to the amount of four thousand dollars. Valuable silks and laces, sir, worth fifty thousand more."

"Whew!" exclaimed Frank, "they did make a haul!"

"That they did, sir," said Main, "and for piracy on the high seas they should be hanged!"

"If they can be caught," said the consul.

"What is it that we fly the Stars and Stripes at our mizzen for, sir?" cried the captain, excitedly. "Will not Uncle Sam protect his own shipping in foreign waters? If he does not, I make free to say that the American flag will be soon swept from the sea!"

"It is certainly a disgrace to our nation that she will tamely submit to insult and outrage even from puny nations," declared the consul. "It is a mistaken desire for peace."

"But national rights, sir, saving your station, should be preserved," cried the captain, vigorously.

"We need a little more of the Monroe spirit in Washington," agreed the consul; "but better days are coming. Uncle Sam is slowly building up a grand navy, and I hope he will adopt a more aggressive policy in the future. However, Captain Main—"

"That is it," interrupted the captain, angrily—"that is just the

way with those nincompoops at Washington! It is always wait a little while—put it off till next session of Congress, or let matters cool down, while everyone of them is figuring up how many dollars he could possibly squeeze out of a compromise for his own pocket. It is a question of personal advantage and—to the devil with the country! True patriotism is dead!”

“You speak strongly, captain,” began the consul.

“I speak from my heart, sir,” cried Main. “I am a citizen of the only land of freedom on earth. I fly the glorious flag of America. And yet in a foreign sea I am set upon by pirates and robbed, and I have no redress. My government is too ineane or cowardly to defend the flag under which I sail. Have I no grievance?”

“You have, sir,” cried Frank heartily; “and it shall be righted.”

“That you say, sir. But you are not the President of the United States.”

“No,” replied the consul; “but he represents the Secretary of the Navy, and has been dispatched here with his submarine boat to deal harshly with the Black Squadron.”

The captain bowed.

“I am honored to meet you,” he said to Frank. “I wish you success. Sink every blasted one of ‘em!”

“I will try and do that,” said Frank earnestly. “Pray tell me in what waters you encountered the Black Squadron, sir?”

“About the eighth degree south, sir, and not far from the San Pierre Islands. We were running free with all sails squared when the whole four quarters of the sea showed a black ship. They swooped down upon us like a flock of buzzards, sir. There was no chance, though we tried to run for it!”

“Are they fast sailers?”

“As fast as ghosts, sir. It would bother a steamer to catch them in a gale of wind.”

Frank made a note of all this. He also asked a few more questions and then said:

“Well, Consul, I leave letters here to be forwarded to Washington by first ship. I will report here when I have swept this Black Squadron from the sea. Not before!”

“I wish you luck, sir!” cried Main. And the Consul also waved an adieu.

Frank returned at once aboard the Rocket.

He was somewhat excited, for he felt that thrilling experiences were near at hand.

He would soon be in the waters haunted by the Black Squadron and then there would be sharp work.

It was his intention to sink every one of the pirate ships at sight if they did not surrender. He knew that they could not be dealt with with any half way measures.

He quickly communicated his plans to Barney and Pomp. They were highly enthusiastic and ready for the fray.

So the Rocket glided out of the harbor of Mozambique with colors flying. Soon she was far out in the channel.

To the north lay the open waters of the Indian Ocean. Sails became more scarce as they proceeded.

The next day land was sighted to the east. Frank made it out as one of the small archipelago of islands in that quarter.

This proved that they were out of the channel. They might now begin to look for the appearance of the Black Squadron.

Northward the Rocket sailed until within five degrees of the Equator. Then Frank took an eastward course.

As yet not a sign of the black ships had been seen. But they now began to run down toward the lower islands, and Frank anticipated coming across them at any moment.

And things came out about as he expected. A day later a group of small islands showed up to the south.

It was in this vicinity that most of the hold-ups had occurred. Frank did not anticipate that the pirates would be able to sight the diminutive Rocket with ease, nor would they be likely to molest so small a craft.

They were looking for big game. And at this juncture it appeared.

A merchant vessel was sighted far to the north. She was evidently making for the Mozambique Channel.

Frank lay to and let her pass a dozen miles to leeward. Then he commenced to slowly dog her.

And when off the small archipelago the crisis came. Out from the shallow straits there glided a long rakish craft.

Another appeared a few points beyond. And yet another showed up.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK SQUADRON.

For the first time Frank Reade, Jr., rested his gaze upon the Black Squadron.

Not all of the pirate vessels put out after the schooner. Three of them still remained in the island inlets.

But three of them gave chase to the vessel. An ominous looking trio they were, too.

Their inky black sails and rakish hulls made them look like ugly ravens after a fair white dove, and that they were sure to overhaul her was quite certain.

The schooner, noting the pursuit, crowded on all sail. But the Black Squadron ran her down like a pack of wolves.

They were now within cannon shot, and a puff of smoke was seen

and a shot crossed the vessel's bows. Then she was seen to come about.

Forward now pressed the three pirates. Frank concluded that it was time to act.

“O ahead, Barney,” he cried, “put on all speed!”

At the same time Frank went to the forward gun. He placed a shell in the breech and watched the black vessels.

The submarine boat was a trifle to windward and it looked as if she would run squarely between the pirate ships and the schooner.

But she did not.

Frank directed Barney to change the course a bit. Then he fired the electric gun.

The shell struck the water in front of the three pirates. In an instant a terrific body of water was hurled into the air.

The effect was thrilling yet not without its comic features. The three black ships seemed to pause as if in surprise.

Then they saw the little craft which looked to them like a torpedo boat. In an instant they were bearing away full before the wind.

At that moment Frank could have overhauled them with a dynamite shell. But he hesitated.

He knew that he would be well justified in sending them all to the bottom. But he was always averse to the wholesale slaughter of human life.

There were hundreds of human beings aboard the pirate ships. To accept the responsibility of hurling them all without warning into eternity was something Frank did not feel like doing.

So he let the three vessels scurry back among the islands. Then he bore over toward the merchant vessel.

“Ahoy the schooner!” he shouted when within hailing distance.

“Ahoy!” came back the reply.

“What craft is that?”

“The Bessie, Captain Layton of Deptford, England!”

“Homeward bound?”

“Aye-aye! by way of Cape Town!”

“All right.”

Frank made a note of this and then turned his course toward the Archipelago where the Black Squadron hovered. As he did so, he saw a big black hulled vessel steam around the lower end of the group.

It required but a glance for Frank to recognize the ship. It was a vessel of war, and no other than the Terrifier.

The British commander was looking for the pirates, and evidently had found them, for there was a sudden boom from her starboard battery.

Shells went bursting through the waters of the island straits, and the pirate ships were seen to scatter.

But one shot directly out into the open sea, and started northward. As the water in the straits was too shallow, the war ship gave her chase.

It was a clever decoy, as Frank could see.

No sooner had the war ship gone, than the other vessels of the black Squadron began to scatter to the further side of the Archipelago. It was easy to assume that the decoy ship would, at a suitable moment, elude the Terrifier by going into shallow water.

But Frank allowed this chase to go on, without any further interest. He turned his attention to the nearest of the black vessels.

The submarine boat carted into one of the inlets, and soon had come within hailing distance of the pirate. So Frank went out on deck.

“Ahoy, the ‘black flag!’” he shouted.

“Ahoy!” came back the reply.

The deck of the pirate vessel was seen to be crowded with the roughest specimens of men on the face of the earth. Every nationality was represented.

What it meant to get into the clutches of those fiends it was easy enough to see.

“What ship are you?” asked Frank.

“The Santa Clara, coast trader,” came back the reply in Spanish.

Frank chuckled at this.

“Where do you hail from?”

“The port of Aden!”

“Who is your captain?”

“Mustapha El Kadir.”

“That’s a lie,” declared the young inventor sotto voce. “Nobody ever knew an Arab to speak such good Spanish.”

Then he made reply:

“If you are a coast trader, why do you wear black sails and fly a black flag? You might be taken for a pirate.”

“That is our affair,” was the reply. “What craft are you?”

“The submarine boat Rocket!”

“You are English?”

“No. American.”

“What do you in these waters?”

“We have come here to force the Black Squadron to surrender. If you are one of that squadron it would be well for you to pull down your colors!”

An insolent laugh came back.

“You talk big, señor Americano, for a little man!”

“I am bigger and stronger than I look!” replied Frank; “bear that in mind, my fine fellow. If you do not surrender within ten minutes I will blow you out of the water!”

A jeering laugh was the only reply. Then men were seen to spring

into the rigging and the Santa Clara began to fill away and glide into another strait.

Frank instantly aimed the electric gun for her bows. He waited the required ten minutes, the Rocket keeping along within hail.

Then he pressed the electric button. The shell struck the water just in front of the Santa Clara.

A terrific tidal wave lifted the pirate vessel as if in giant hands and for a moment it seemed as if she must be swamped.

Then she shot forward with the water rushing into a hole in her bows until the flood of waters had carried her high up over the island reef.

And there, as the wave receded, she was left with only a part of her stern in the water. She was actually beached.

This astounding denouement filled the pirates with awful terror. They swarmed over the ship's side like flies and rushed up the island cliff.

Frank could have easily annihilated them, but he did not care to consummate such slaughter. So he allowed them to escape.

"Bejabbers!" cried Barney, "that settled them fast enough! I wonder if they are satisfied?"

"I hope so," laughed Frank. "Well, there is one of the pirate vessels disposed of. There are five left. It is now in order to attend to them."

"Golly!" shouted Pomp, "wha' am 'at, Marse Frank? Looks like a flag ob truce, sah!"

What? exclaimed the young inventor. "What do you mean, Pomp?"

"Look dar, sah?"

The darky pointed to one of the rear ports of the pirate ship. Frank gave a start.

Somebody inside was excitedly waving a white cloth, thrust between some iron bars. The young inventor brought the Rocket to a halt.

He was not a little puzzled to understand the meaning of the signal at first. Then a sudden idea came to him.

"A prisoner!" he ejaculated. "Why, of course. What could be more natural?"

Then he sent the submarine boat forward until she was within fifty yards of the grated window. A white face was seen beyond it.

"Help!" came a voice from beyond it, in unmistakable English. What was more thrilling was the fact that it was a woman's voice.

"Give me help! I am a prisoner in this awful place. Oh, if you are men, give me help!"

"That we will," cried Frank, cheerily. "Keep up good heart, I will come to you at once."

Pomp took the wheel now and Frank and Barney hastily armed themselves. A small boat was got out upon the Rocket's deck.

In this they quickly rowed over to the stranded vessel. Not a pirate was in sight anywhere.

Over the rail the two rescuers went. Down the dingy cabin stairs and into a reeking atmosphere.

Frank speedily found the stateroom in which was confined the pirates' prisoner. He broke the lock and flung open the door.

He was instantly face to face with a very beautiful young girl. She was slender and petite and although very pale, was yet very lovely.

With a little glad scream she came toward Frank, scanning his features and at once reassured.

"Oh, I know you are one of my countrymen," she said, "and you are a friend."

"You may be sure of that!" cried Frank. "You need have no fears! But how did you get into this terrible place?"

She shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"It is a terrible story," she moaned. "Oh! my heart is crushed! I can never be happy again. My dear father and his fine ship are at the bottom of the sea. He was murdered with all his crew by these pirates. They would have killed me too but that Black Casper, one of their captains, interfered and brought me here, saying that I should be his wife. Oh, the horror of it all!"

"That is dreadful," exclaimed Frank, "and they should all hang for it, the murderous wretches! But may I ask—are you an American?"

"I am," replied the young girl. "My name is Clare Ralston. My father was Captain Ralston of the brig Barnacle. We sailed from Boston for Calcutta, where we hoped to arrive this month, and where I was to be married to a friend of my youth, Mr. Allan Clark, an employee of the Indian Company. But we were beset by these dreadful pirates, and I have no other course but to throw myself upon your charity."

CHAPTER VII.

RUN ASHORE.

"AND which you may rest assured I am only too willing to yield," declared Frank. "Only call it not charity but hospitality, if you please."

"That would relieve the burden," she said, with a bewitching smile, "but what a small craft is yours, sir."

"Yes," replied Frank, "she is small but very powerful."

"I should say so, from the fearful shot you gave this ship. I suppose they tried to capture you?"

"Not exactly," replied Frank. "We were pursuing her. But she was no match for us with our dynamite guns."

"Oh, then yours is a government vessel?" she asked.

"In the employ of the government," replied Frank. "I have been chartered by the Secretary of the Navy to visit these parts and exterminate the Black Squadron."

"But why did not Uncle Sam send a man-o'-war?" asked she, in surprise.

"He did, but without much success. The Tennessee was unable to chase the pirates to close quarters on account of the shallow waters."

"But you—"

"My vessel is a submarine boat and capable of easily sailing where the pirate dhows can go," replied Frank.

"Do you mean that your boat sails under water?"

"Yes."

Clare Ralston was plainly astonished. She gazed at Frank almost incredulously, whereat he smiled and said:

"But enough of this. Let us go back to the Rocket and then I can the better explain all to you."

She said nothing but allowed herself to be placed in the Rocket's boat and rowed away to the submarine boat. As she stepped on the deck she was plainly surprised.

Clare Ralston, as a shipmaster's daughter, had a good knowledge of vessels of all kinds. Therefore she was able to appreciate the submarine boat.

Frank escorted her over it, explaining all its fittings to which she listened with interest.

When all was over she drew a deep breath.

"Really," she declared, "it is all very wonderful. There is no other vessel like it on earth. You are a wonderful inventor, Mr. Reade."

"Shure, miss, that's phwat iverybody says," declared Barney.

"And it is right," agreed the young girl.

Frank flushed with pleasure and not a little embarrassment.

"But I hope you will sink every one of these black vessels!" she cried with flashing eyes.

"I shall try to do so!" declared Frank; "you may depend upon that. And that makes me think that we are losing valuable time."

"Shure yez will have to do the rist by electric loight," declared Barney.

And indeed this was seen to be a fact, for night had suddenly shut down. This was an unwelcome incident.

However, the search-light's rays went flashing through the straits. None of the Black Squadron had yet been located when a catastrophe occurred.

From out the distant gloom there came a flash and a dull boom. Then the Rocket gave a shiver and there was a crash of steel and wood.

Guided by the brilliant light one of the pirate vessels had sent a shot into the hull of the Rocket. It was at the water line also.

A thrilling cry pealed from Barney's lips.

"Och, Misther Frank, shure the boat is sinking, sor. Bad cess to the omadhouns."

"Steady!" cried Frank; "throw the search-light that way, Barney!"

And he sprang to the dynamite gun. Barney obeyed orders, and the search light showed the dark hull of the pirate in the far lagoon.

But Frank was unable to place a shell in the dynamite gun before another shot came from the pirate.

But luckily this passed over the submarine boat and did no harm.

The next moment the dynamite gun sent a shell tearing across to the lagoon. There was a terrific explosion, but it did not strike the pirate vessel.

Before Frank could fire again it had glided out of range.

And all this while water had been pouring into the rent in the Rocket's hull. It was fast invading the cabin, and it was plain that something must be done at once.

Barney and Pomp were rattled, Clare Ralston was in a state of nervous excitement.

But Frank very fortunately was as cool as need be, and at once decided upon what he saw was the most feasible plan.

He sprang into the pilot house and turned the search-light in every direction. No other pirate was in sight.

Satisfied of this, he jammed the wheel hard down and started the engines at full speed.

The boat shot forward and straight for the island beach. Barney and Pomp were at a loss to understand Frank's move and shouted:

"Marse Frank, you'se gwine fo' de shore!"

"Be jabbers, we'll run aground."

"That is what I want to do," replied the young inventor, "the only way to save the boat is to beach her!"

And this Frank saw was the truth. To allow her to sink even in those shallow waters would be fatal.

She was a light craft, and it would not be so very difficult to get her off the beach. It would save flooding the cabins, and in fact was the only logical move that could be made.

Straight for the beach ran the Rocket. Fortunately the water was deep enough to float her until she could run her bow high and dry on land, and there she rested.

The rent in her side was now above the water line. Frank at once put pumps at work and got the water out of her hold.

In that protected strait she had nothing to fear from the weather or the action of the sea. On the morrow the leak could be repaired, and she could be got afloat again.

But the immediate danger Frank foresaw was from the pirates. As soon as they discovered her position they would be sure to attack her.

So Frank loaded all of the guns and kept one man, either himself or Barney or Pomp, at the search-light all night.

Once one of the pirate vessels had the audacity to show her nose around the end of the island.

Before she could get in position, however, Frank sent a shell after her and she decamped. Thus the long night wore away.

There was little sleep for Clare Ralston that night.

The young girl was much excited and paced the cabin floor anxiously, in spite of Frank's protest.

"I fear that I am largely responsible for all this trouble," she cried; "but for me you might not have delayed here and become exposed to the pirate's guns."

"Nonsense!" cried Frank; "that is not true. There was the risk at all times!"

"Begorra, we might have got worse!" declared Barney.

"That is true!" agreed Frank?

But morning came at last. Then the position of the submarine boat could be easily examined.

It was seen that she rested easily upon a bed of sand. The rent made by the cannon ball extended through her entire hull, passing through the cabin just above the deck.

The woodwork was badly splintered, and there was some damage done the furniture. But Frank saw that he could quickly repair the outer shell with an iron plate and some rivets so that she would soon be all right again.

To get her afloat again would be the problem. But this could be solved later.

So he at once began work upon the repairing of the rent in the steel shell. A staging was swung over the rail, and Barney and Frank proceeded to make the patch.

Holes were drilled for the bolts and the steel plate was fitted. In a few hours the bolts were in place ready for the nuts. But before they could be adjusted Pomp sent up a warning cry:

"Hi, hi, Marse Frank!" he shouted, "here comes de pirates by land! Fo' de lan's sake git abo'd quick!"

In an instant Frank and Barney swung themselves up over the rail. They were not a moment too soon.

For there suddenly appeared on the cliff above a score or more of the pirates. They were the Santa Clara's crew, and they had returned to find that their foe was aground on the island.

Loud yells went up and bullets pattered down upon the hull of the Rocket. It was lucky for Barney and Frank that they were safe in the cabin.

"Be me sowl!" cried Barney, "I niver once thought av their comin' in from that way. Shure, they moight have nipped us av it hadn't been for the naygur."

"You're right!" agreed Frank; "but we might return their fire!"

"Why not?" cried Barney, seizing his rifle; "cum on wid yez, naygur."

But Pomp needed no second bidding. He was on hand instantly.

The two jokers opened a lively fire upon the pirates with their Winchester's, and it was effective.

The pirates were exposed to the deadly aim, while their bullets might rattle harmlessly against the armor of the submarine boat.

The pirates began to drop rapidly, and soon fell back from the edge of the cliff. Barney and Pomp sent up a wild cheer of triumph.

But this did not materially improve the situation for the submarine voyagers. They dared not go out on deck, for in the crevices of the cliffs lurked the pirate marksmen ready to shoot them down.

And while this state of affairs should last it did not seem possible to float the Rocket. In order to do this it would seem necessary to get out on deck.

How long the pirates might hold the siege it was not easy to say. Altogether the outlook was serious.

But while the voyagers were watching the pirates on the cliff, they came near falling victims to another more deadly peril.

But for the clever foresight of Clare Ralston this would have been an accomplished fact. The young girl came rushing from the rear turret where she had been on guard in an extremely excited manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

LAUNCHING THE BOAT.

"OH, Mr. Reade!" she cried excitedly, "the pirate vessels are coming into the inlet. They may get another shot at us!"

In an instant Frank was upon his feet.

"Miss Clare!" he ejaculated. "You have saved us!"

He sprang into the main turret and saw that the young girl was right. The topmasts of the pirate vessels could be seen beyond the island headland as they approached the inlet.

They were coming to attack and annihilate the submarine boat beyond a doubt. For a moment Frank was thrilled.

Then his nerves became steel. He watched the tall masts for a moment. Then he adjusted one of the dynamite guns.

An impulse caused him to look in the other direction.

And there at the other end of the inlet he saw two more of the ships approaching.

Advancing to the attack from both directions it was seen that the entire squadron intended swooping down upon the Rocket.

The situation was certainly a critical one.

But Frank laid his plans of defense at once. He shouted to Barney.

"Take the other gun in this turret, Barney!" he commanded; "keep your eye upon the two ships over there, and when they come within range fire!"

"All roight, sor!"

Barney was delighted at the prospect of having a chance to fire one of the dynamite guns. He took his position as Frank ordered.

Frank, meanwhile, had his attention fully occupied with the other three.

He knew that all depended upon getting in the first shot.

If the pirates were allowed to fire upon the Rocket its fate was sealed, for its shell was too thin to resist a cannon ball.

Had the Rocket been afloat all would have been well, for then it could have plunged under the surface and thus defeated the aim of the foe. As it was Frank knew that he must hold the ships beyond range.

On glided the three pirates. Now the foremost had reached the point of the island's arm which protected it.

Another moment and it would be broadside on and would doubtless fire at the Rocket. Frank placed his finger on the electric button.

His keen eye glanced over the gun's sight.

Then he pressed the button.

Just at that moment the pirate's bow slid clear of the point of land. Just at that instant the dynamite shell struck it full and fair.

There was a terrible roar and a mighty upheaval of water and debris. When this subsided not a piece of the ship was left.

The sea was covered with the wreckage, and the few survivors of the crew were swimming for their lives.

"Only four of the Black Squadron left!" grunted Frank. "And we are still on deck!"

"Hooray!" shouted Pomp, executing a break down. "Massy Lordy! dat was jes' a good one!"

Clare Ralston was intensely delighted. In her eyes the dynamite guns were a marvel.

But Barney was chagrined to see that the two ships he had been trying to get a line on came about and dared not enter the inlet. The pirates were appalled at the fate of their ship.

The remaining four vessels now beat a precipitate retreat. The pirates on the cliff yelled their discomfiture.

The submarine voyagers felt that they had really achieved a victory. One great point had been scored in the destruction of the second pirate vessel.

"Now if those confounded rascals were only off that cliff," said Frank, "we would be all right."

"Begorra, phwat's the raison we can't drive thim off?" said Barney.

"How?"

"Shure, sor, wud they stay there if we sint up some av the dynamite shells to thim?"

"The trouble would be to hit them. They can easily retire beyond the edge of the cliff and be safe!"

"But, sor, if we kin kape thim back out av the way, thim we moight find it safe enough to go out an' worruk on the boat."

"That is not impossible," agreed Frank. "We can at least try it."

"Whurroo! I'll foix the spalpeens!" cried Barney, who was only too glad of a chance at the electric gun.

So the Celt sighted the gun, and sent a charge of dynamite up over the brow of the cliff.

It exploded with prodigious force, blowing off many square yards of the rock and turf. It had the effect desired by the Celt.

The pirates were driven back from the cliff. But it was necessary to throw a shell every few minutes or they would return.

However, it did really make the coast safe for Frank and Pomp to venture out on deck. The young inventor now began to study up some feasible plan for floating the Rocket.

A score of men might have pushed her out into the deeper water, so light was she, but that number were, of course, not at hand. However, Frank was not to be defeated. He drew a sight across the inlet to a huge angle of the rocky cliff.

"I believe, with tackle and the capstan, we can pull her out by carrying a line to that cliff," he cried. "The leverage would be powerful."

"Yas, sah," agreed Pomp. "I reckon dat wud be easy, sah."

"Well, you black rascal, get out the light boat and the long cable. I'll go over there with you, and we'll see what can be done."

"A'right, sah!"

In a few moments the Rocket's boat was out, and Frank and Pomp were carrying the double line of cable and the great pulley blocks across to the cape.

It was quite a little task to pay out the heavy ropes, and it required nearly an hour to reach the cliff angle; but the task was finally accomplished.

The jagged corner of the cliff furnished powerful anchorage. The pulleys were fastened to it, and then Frank and Pomp returned to the Rocket.

But just as they reached the submarine boat a startling thing happened. Upon the island shore opposite, a long line of men were seen rushing over the cliff.

They were making straight for the spot where the cable was anchored. The truth was seen at once.

The pirates had gone around to the other shore of the opposite island

and had landed a force of men. Their purpose now was to cut the cable.

For a moment Frank was so surprised that he could not act. "Whurroo!" shouted Barney. "Wud yez see the omadhouns! Shure phwere is me rifle!"

Barney and Pomp both seized their gans and opened fire on the pirates. This was returned.

The bullets were whistling across the deck in an uncomfortable manner and Frank ordered all into the cabin.

Then he sprang to the electric gun. One shell placed directly in the path of the pirates settled the matter.

They scattered like chaff over the cliffs leaving a number of their dead and wounded behind. In a few moments none of them were in sight.

Frank now sprang to the electric windlass. In a few moments he had the cable about the strong steel shaft and shouted to Barney to start the engines slowly.

The Celt obeyed.

The big cable straightened and grew taut. It creaked and groaned and the windlass began to go slowly. For one moment the tension hung, then the hull of the Rocket began to creak.

The powerful strain began to tell and the boat moved a few inches. "Good!" shouted Frank; "at this rate we'll soon have her out! Now, once more, Barney, slow and steady!"

Once again the cable grew taut. The boat's keel grated over the sands. She gained a foot.

Again and again the pull was made and soon the Rocket had traveled the length of herself.

Half of her hull was now in deep water. With fifty feet more of the sand overcome she would be all afloat.

But just at this moment Pomp and Clare, who had been watching the shore, gave cries of alarm.

Frank looked out of the pilot house window and beheld a startling sight.

A great body of the pirates suddenly appeared on the opposite cliff with a cannon. It was on trucks, and they had dragged it all the way across the island.

They were seen to be quickly loading it. Frank saw that there was no time to lose.

Like a panther he sprang to the gun in the rear turret. He slipped a shell in the breech and fired.

It struck the cliff just under the cannon. One shot was enough.

When the cloud of smoke cleared not a trace of the cannon was anywhere to be seen. The pirates had dispersed like frightened sheep.

It was of no use. The pirates could not cope with the deadly electric guns of the Rocket. In every instance they got the worst of the encounter.

The submarine voyagers indulged in a cheer. Then once more work was begun on the windlass.

Steadily and by degrees the Rocket was pulled out of the sand into deep water. Suddenly she floated safe and sound once more.

It was a joyful moment for the voyagers.

"Begorra, we've mended the boat an' it's ready we are to fight the whole fleet av the pirates now!" cried Barney.

"Yes, under water!" agreed Frank; "but we must look out and not let them get another shot at us. It is good fortune that we did not sink in deep water!"

Clare Ralston was perhaps the happiest person on board. Once more her hopes arose.

"I am beginning to think that I shall see Calcutta after all," she said, "fortune is not all against me!"

"You may rest quite well assured that you will join your fiance safe and sound!" declared Frank; "and you will have an exciting story to tell him!"

"The incidents of the past few weeks I shall never forget," said the young girl sadly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURNING SHIP.

The cable was quickly taken up, and the submarine boat was once more ready for the fray. But the Black Squadron had disappeared.

Not one of the vessels could be seen in any direction. Frank sailed around among the isles, looking in every inlet and strait.

"That is queer!" he muttered; "where can they have gone?"

"I have an idea," said Clare.

"Indeed, Miss Ralston," said Frank, politely; "I would be very glad to hear it."

"Well," said the young girl, succinctly, "they have probably decided that it is impossible for them to whip the Rocket, even in her crippled condition."

"Yes!"

"Therefore they had concluded that she was just as harmless as if she was whipped, being ashore. So they have gone off to sea again to look for prey. Am I right?"

Frank could not help admiring the keen penetration and acute perception of this young girl. He raised his cap with a polite bow.

"Miss Ralston, your conclusion does you credit," he said. "There is little doubt but that you are right."

"It is only a deduction," she said, with a naive smile.

"But a very clever one. We shall proceed upon your assumption."

"For which I trust we will not be sorry."

"I hardly fear that."

That the Black Squadron had once more put to sea, there was little doubt. Frank, however, was ready to go after them.

So after making sure that they were not in the Archipelago, he steered a course into the open sea.

Naught was to be seen on all hands, but the wide expanse of billows, save the small collection of islets. The Black Squadron had made good time in getting below the horizon.

There was no way but to guess at the course they had taken. Frank proceeded due northeast.

Soon, so swiftly did the Rocket run, that the isles were but specs on the horizon. Then Barney shouted:

"Sail ho!"

Frank instantly sprang to the upper deck with his glass.

"Whereaway?" he shouted.

"Due north, sir!"

Frank turned his glass in that direction, and he saw that Barney was right.

There upon the horizon lay a huge black hull; over it hung what looked like a cloud of black canvas.

In that moment Frank fancied that it was one of the Black Squadron. But a moment later he saw that what he had taken for the ship's sails was really black smoke.

It came from the funnels of a steamer. As the vessel was approaching Frank decided to hail her.

For an hour the two vessels approached each other until Frank saw with surprise that the steamer was no other than the British warship, *Terrifier*.

As she came near, Frank hailed her.

"Ahoy, Englishman!" he shouted. "How goes the chase?"

"We haven't seen a pirate," was the reply. "They dodged us among those small islands. Have you seen them?"

"Yes."

"Ah, get within shot of them!"

"We have sunk two of them," replied Frank. "Now we are looking for the other four."

The English commander was dumfounded. So interested was he that he ordered out his gig and went aboard the Yankee craft.

And there he listened to Frank's story with wonderment.

"Well, you Yankees are smart," he acknowledged. "But you have got just the craft to hunt them with."

"You didn't think so when we were at Cape Town," said Frank, with a grin.

"We live to learn," admitted the British captain. "However, I am glad of your success."

"Thank you!"

"On the whole, I think the *Terrifier* might as well go home."

"A number of reasons. In the first place she could never chase those rascals among the shoal waters of the archipelago!"

"Well, that is so!"

"Again, you are capable and pretty certain to take care of every one of the black ships without any assistance from us. We therefore are of no use here."

"Unless you could run them down in the open sea!"

"Ah, there is little hope of that. The rascals are too shrewd."

Frank did not express his true thoughts which were in exact accord with this declaration of the British captain's. The *Terrifier* lay alongside for an hour or two and then went her way.

But Frank had arranged with the captain to make a long sweep across the horizon, and in case of sighting the black ships it would be easy to drive them into the path of the other, or between two fires.

So Frank veered to the southeast and the *Terrifier* to the northeast. For several hours they were in sight of each other.

Then darkness shut down and distance separated them as well. The next morning the *Terrifier* could be seen nowhere.

For three days the Rocket scoured these seas without once getting a sight of a black sail. This had caused Frank to do some thinking.

Had the four remaining ships of the Black Squadron decamped for other seas and new fields to conquer? Had they found the mouth of the Mozambique Channel too warm territory for them?

In this case much valuable time was being lost. But Clare Ralston did not believe this.

"They think your boat is ashore and a wreck," she said; "they do not fear these cumbersome warships. They would not leave their familiar stamping ground."

The sun was now two hours high. The sea was nearly calm and the Rocket pushing along at a fifteen knot rate when suddenly Pomp shouted:

"Hi—hi! look out dere! Amn't dat a big fire?"

Frank glanced at the horizon. Then he gave a mighty start.

There was visible a great blaze of light, a pyramid of flame. One great cry welled from his lips.

"Fire! My soul! it is a burning vessel!"

There is something intensely horrifying at the sight of a ship on fire at sea. Something which makes the flesh creep and the soul pall.

So it is hardly to be wondered at that Frank's blood ran chill and his teeth chattered. Then he suddenly remembered that there was a possible chance to yield succor to some poor human being out yonder.

He sprang to the lever and put on the whole power of the dynamos. The propeller literally thrashed the water and the Rocket sped forward like an arrow.

Nearer they drew to the burning vessel until now her crumbling spars and glaring ports could be seen.

And as she loomed up now not a mile distant suddenly Clare Ralston called out with thrilling force:

"There is the explanation of this awful affair. There goes the assassin and the incendiary!"

She pointed to the distant horizon beyond the burning vessel. A black cloud of canvas on a vessel hull down was seen.

Here was some of the Black Squadron's work. Here was one of her victims, and not a soul left to tell the awful tale.

In the vessel's glowing cabins, no doubt, were the incinerated bones of her unhappy crew, the victims of the ravenous wolves of the sea. It was a horrible piece of work.

The Rocket steamed about the blazing ship, going as near as they dared. But no living being could be aboard the doomed vessel, for from stem to stern—from keel to masthead—she was a pyramid of flame.

No floating wreckage or drifting survivors were to be found. The Black Squadron had done its work well. Dead men tell no tales.

Frank wasted no time in striking out in pursuit of the pirate vessels. Only one of them seemed to be in sight.

Where were the others?

Clare Ralston, with her usual power of perception, advanced a theory.

"Probably this vessel was held up and burned by only one of the squadron. Doubtless they have considered it safer to travel singly!"

"Right!" cried Frank; "in that case we can only hunt them down one by one!"

"Begorra, we must niver let this one escape us!" declared Barney.

"Never!" agreed Frank; "spare no effort. Tax the engines to the utmost."

So the chase was begun.

And the advantage was with the submarine boat, for the sea was now almost in a dead calm. Very rapidly the black ship was overhauled.

And the pirates did not sight the small pursuer until she was not two miles distant. It was now an hour after noon.

Then they began to crowd on all sail. But they might as well have tried to escape the vengeance of a Divine Power.

The Rocket crept upon them like the weasel upon the stupefied hare. Like the Nemesis which swoops down upon the evil doer.

Barney took the wheel and Frank went into the turret. He trained one of the guns.

At this moment a distant boom was heard, and a cannon ball struck the water far short. The pirates were opening the battle.

"What will you do, Mr. Reade?" asked Clare Ralston with dilated eyes. "Will you give them any chance for a parley or a surrender?"

"Not a chance!" said the young inventor, grimly, "there is but one way to deal with them, and that is to consign the whole parcel of them to eternity. It is but justice."

The young girl stole down into the cabin. She could not witness the destruction of the pirate vessel, even though she knew that it was just.

Frank very carefully sighted his gun. He experienced not the slightest twinge of pity or compassion. The next moment he pressed the button.

CHAPTER X.

BACK TO THE ISLANDS.

THE dynamite shell was well aimed. It struck the pirate vessel full under her quarter.

In that one brief instant her career and that of her crew was terminated. There was a terrific roar and a thunderous crash.

It seemed as if a great revulsion of the ocean's bosom had swept the ship down into awful depths. Twenty seconds later the surface was calm, and far and wide were scattered bits of wreckage, all that was left of the pirate ship.

"Three more," said Frank, grimly. "Half of the Black Squadron has gone to its account; now for the others!"

"Begorra, it's a good job!" averred Barney.

"Yo' am right, I'ish," said Pomp.

Clare now came up from the cabin. She was quite courageous and calm now.

"These seas will be safe for honest vessels before I leave them," said Frank, resolutely. "The sight of that burning ship stirred me all up. It is no quarter with me now!"

"An' three more av the omadhouns to hunt down," cried Barney; "shure I wish we had him in sight now."

"So do I," said Frank, "but we'll hunt them down!"

The submarine boat now stood away to the eastward. If the Terrorifer was keeping a true course it was possible that she might drive another one of the pirate vessels in toward the Rocket.

If she did—woe to that ship. The Rocket was now a merciless destroyer.

Night came and no vessel was sighted. Yet the Rocket held her course until the next morning. Then a distant cloud of smoke appeared on the horizon.

"The Terrorifer!" declared Frank. "We have reached the end of our circle. I wonder if she saw anything of the pirates."

A distant signal gun was heard. Frank answered it and the two vessels drew nearer.

Soon the Terrorifer was within hailing distance.

"Aho!" cried Frank. "Did you sight any of the Black Squadron?"

"Ay, ay!" was the reply. "Yesterday near sunset we gave chase to one of the black ships and lost her on a southwest course in a fog!"

"Southwest!" exclaimed Frank. "That should have driven her into us!"

"That is true!"

"Then she passed us in the night. That is hard luck."

"Aho the Rocket!" came the hail again from the British man-o'-war.

"Ay, ay!" replied Frank.

"Did you sight any of the Black Squadron?"

"Ay, ay!" replied the young inventor. "And we gave chase and sunk one of them just after she had captured and burned an unknown vessel."

"Well, I'll be keel-hauled!" cried the British captain. "You beat the world, sir! That leaves only three of the black rascals."

"That is all."

"We must give you a cheer and a salute for your good grit. The Yankee is a good one—we own up."

And the British commander was as good as his word. He brought the Terrorifer about, lined his crew at the rail, gave cheers, ran up the Stars and Stripes and fired three volleys from his starboard battery.

This was a compliment extraordinary and Frank answered it by displaying the British colors. Then the two vessels parted agreeing to proceed at different points to the south and meet again off the Archipelago.

The Terrorifer was playing a useful part in the game and might yet prove of great assistance. Frank was willing to admit this.

Frank now believed that the three remaining vessels were south of him and possibly in the neighborhood of the rendezvous among the isles.

So he was determined to stand in nearer the mouth of Mozambique channel and the course of coast going vessels.

If the Black Squadron was out further to sea, it was likely that the Terrorifer would drive them in once they could be sighted. Frank felt sure of his game.

For two days the Rocket kept on her southward course. At night the search-light swept the sea. In the day time Barney and Pomp were constantly on the watch.

But not a sign of the Black Squadron was seen.

At last land was sighted to windward. It was soon made out to be one of the islands of the Archipelago.

"Stand in toward them, Barney," said Frank. "We ought to see something of them in there."

"All roight, sor!"

Nearer drew the isles, and everybody was on the qui vive. But still nothing could be seen of the squadron.

Finally the submarine boat once more entered the inlet where they had been stranded a week before. There was the wreck of the Santa Clara, just as the pirates had left it.

But no sign was visible of the villains themselves.

"Begorra, I'll bate they've skipped out for some other part av the world," declared Barney. "Shure, they must know that it's no use fer them to try an' foight the Rocket."

"It is not impossible," agreed Frank, "but that only makes the task the harder for us. We must hunt them down."

"Begorra, sor, that's thrue! It's a big ocean this is!"

"Indeed, yes, but they need not confine themselves to the Indian Ocean. There is the entire South Pacific. Among the Archipelagoes of the Ten Thousand Isles they could give us a chase which might last indefinitely."

"How are we to learn whether or not such is the truth?" asked Clare Ralston.

"It will not be easy," declared Frank. "We must first thoroughly search these parts and speak every passing ship for tidings of the rascals. I think we could judge in that way whether they had departed or not."

"Then you do not think that destroying half their ships will break up the gang?"

"By no means! Total extinction is the only remedy."

The Rocket now sailed through the various straits and a close watch was kept for some sign of the foe. Thus the day was spent.

When night came no trace of them had been found. However, the search was continued until a late hour by search-light.

A little past midnight, however, Frank anchored the Rocket, and all turned in for a good night's rest. Barney was on guard.

The voyagers had just got settled into a profound slumber when an exciting incident occurred.

Barney suddenly saw a faint star of light gliding along the high ridge of one of the isles. It seemed to be dancing in air like a will-o'-the-wisp.

The Celt rubbed his eyes and stared at it.

"Be me sowl!" he muttered, "that's quare enough. Phwat the devil is it anyway?"

The light swayed and moved and seemed creeping along to the end of the island. For a moment the Celt's superstitious fears were aroused.

Then he put aside fear, and performed a sensible act. He sprang to the search-light and turned it full upon the distant ball of light.

The truth was revealed in a brief instant.

He saw outlined in the pathway of electric light the upper spars and rigging of a ship. In an instant he gave a wild whoop.

"Misther Frank!" he yelled; "shure, here's wan av the pirate ships. Come quick, fer the loife av yez!"

Frank was aroused from his slumbers by the loud shout. In an instant he was upon his feet.

He rushed out of the cabin half clad. A glance was enough.

Back he went to the cabin and dressed himself. In a jiffy all of the Rocket's crew were out on deck and ready for business.

Of course, the glare of the search-light had been seen by the crew of the pirate vessel. They had been groping their way into the straits in the dark.

It had brought them to a stop, and the distant sound of men rushing to arms could be heard. But as yet the arm of the island protected them. Frank could not get a line upon them with the electric gun.

But this fact also furnished protection to the Rocket, for the pirates likewise could not use their cannon.

But Frank was resolved to proceed at once to the attack. He did not purpose that the foe should escape if he could prevent it.

So the Rocket glided quickly forward. Meanwhile the pirate vessel had made a desperate attempt to get out of the inlet.

She swung about and as luck had it the wind filled her sails and she stood out to sea. Frank reached the point just in time to see her speeding away at full speed.

The young inventor was about to give chase when a muffled boom smote upon the air. A cannon ball went whistling over the quarter of the Rocket.

The pirate meant business. One shot after another followed.

Why none of them hit the submarine boat was a mystery. But they did not.

Frank saw that this vessel had longer range guns than any of the other pirate ships, so he did not attempt, at that distance and in the darkness, to risk a shot with the dynamite gun.

"I'll fix her another way," he said. "Into the cabin all!"

The order was obeyed, and Frank sent the Rocket down under the surface. This was seen by the pirates, who sent up a cheer, thinking they had sunk their foe.

But the submarine boat's search-light showed through the water, and to the amazement of the pirates came gliding after them. They crowded on all sail.

But that weird, unearthly glow on the waters, followed them like a Nemesis. It was impossible for them to evade it.

Nearer it drew, until it was not a hundred yards at their stern post.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE CRUISER.

THE pirates were unable to understand the phenomenon. That strange inexplicable light which seemed to glide under the water towards them was a very queer thing indeed.

In vain they tried to shake it off. As fast as their ship sailed, it sailed faster.

Frank, in the pilot house, had got his eye upon the keel of the pirate vessel and was gauging his course accordingly.

He speedily gained on the pirate until the Rocket was directly under her hull.

Then he went below and took from a locker a curious shaped object which looked like a whaler's bomb lance.

To this he attached a long coil of wire. Then he called to Barney:

"Barney, can you place this torpedo, or shall I?"

"To be shure, Mr. Frank, it'll save yez the thrubble if I do it."

"Get on your diving suit, then."

"All roight, sor."

Clare Ralston was at one of the observation windows. It was a new and wonderful thing for her to be sailing under water in this way. In her estimation Frank Reade, Jr., was one of the most wonderful of men.

She could hardly understand how he could so easily overcome tremendous obstacles and perform such prodigies of ingenuity.

She was curious as to how the torpedo was to be placed in the pirate ship's hull. In the ordinary case it was done with a gun.

But in a few moments Barney appeared with a diver's helmet on his head and a knapsack of steel on his back.

This latter held a chemical generator, by means of which air was supplied to the diver and a circulation kept up by means of a valve in the helmet. This diving device was Frank Reade, Jr.'s own invention.

It was superior to the ordinary diving suit, in that it was safer and the diver's movements were unhampered by any life line.

Barney, thus equipped, was ready to go out on the vessel's deck while she was under water. He was enabled to accomplish this by means of another ingenious device.

This was in the shape of the vestibule leading from the cabin to the deck. Stepping into this, Barney closed the door leading into the cabin.

Then he turned a valve, which instantly filled the vestibule with water.

Opening the outer door, he stepped out on deck.

He carried heavy leaden shoes on his feet, but the pressure of the water across the deck was so great that he was nearly swept from it.

He crept forward, however, to the forward platform right over the ram. Frank, in the pilot house, was watching him.

And now the young inventor allowed the bow of the boat to rise, very steadily and slowly, until it almost touched the keel of the pirate ship.

Then Barney balanced himself and jabbed the keen point of the lance into the vessel's hull.

The wire payed out and the submarine boat sank a ways. When the pirate vessel was several hundred yards distant Barney made the connections with an electric switch at the pilot house.

His work was now done and he retreated to the vestibule. Closing the deck door he pressed a valve which caused the water to recede from the vestibule by means of a pneumatic pump.

Then he opened the opposite door and stepped into the cabin.

He removed his helmet and said:

"All roight, Misther Frank, it's all done."

"Good!" cried the young inventor. "You did well! Now the fate of that vessel is sealed!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Clare; "what are you going to do, Mr. Reade?"

"Terminate the existence of another one of this merciless Black Squadron."

"And her crew—"

"Will share the fate of the vessel."

The young girl shivered.

"I suppose it is only justice," she said. "May God have mercy on their wretched souls."

Frank stepped into the pilot house. He quickly made connections with the battery.

One moment he hesitated.

By simply touching the electric button he knew that he would hurl at least a hundred souls into eternity. It seemed almost like murder.

But he remembered that these same wretches had sunk many a fine ship and its crew, and if left to their own devices, would sink many another.

This settled the case. His heart was steeled.

He closed his eyes and pressed the button sharply and quickly. It required but the infinitesimal part of a second for the electric current to traverse the wire.

Almost simultaneous with the pressing of the button the explosion came.

There was a dull shock, the submarine boat seemed to rise for a moment as if lifted by giant hands. Then great currents of water rushed by the windows.

The next moment Frank sent the Rocket to the surface. The search-light swept a wide radius.

Not a sign of the black vessel could be seen. A few piles of wreck-age floated on the tide to which clung some wretched beings.

Frank did not offer to give them succor. He turned the prow of the submarine boat back toward the isles.

"Only two of the devils left," he muttered; "then the job is done!"

"Be Mither Murphy's pig," cried Barney. "that was a foine go. Shure, it shapped that boat all to pieces. Divil a wan av thim pirates will iver see diry land agin!"

"You're right, Barney!" agreed Frank; "but it's a fate they deserved!"

"Shure enough, sor, an' it's not me is begrudging thim. They'll niver rob an' burn any more foine ships!"

"That's true!"

"But, sor, there's two more av thim to deal with yet."

"Yes," replied Frank; "and then we can leave these waters and go where we please."

"Och, sor, that will be a happy toime!"

"So it will," agreed Frank; "for, to tell the truth, I don't like this sort of work. It is too much like war."

"Well, sor, it's fer the good av yure country."

"That is true. If I did not do the job some war ship would have to do it."

"An' shure it's better luck they musht have thin any that's thried it yet," declared Barney.

But the words had barely left the Celt's lips when all were given a sudden start.

From a point not two miles to the northward there came the roar of a rifled cannon.

The flash of the discharge was plainly seen. Also the broad pathway of a search-light.

"A war ship!" cried Frank. "I wonder if that is the Terrorifer?"

"Shure, sor, it may be," agreed Barney, "but phwativer is she foiring at?"

"There could be but one thing."

"The pirates, sor?"

"Just so!"

"Glory!" shouted Pomp, "dere goes another shot!"

Again the battery of the war ship spoke. It was certain that she was firing at some foe, whether a pirate or not.

Frank carefully noted by the discharges the direction of the balls sent out by the war ship's guns. Then he began to draw nearer to the big vessel.

He soon had her within range of the search-light, and at once saw that she was not the Terrorifer. Nor indeed was she any one of the war ships he had seen at Cape Town.

"That is queer," he muttered, and then gave a great shout.

The film of the atmosphere was dispelled more clearly by the search light now, and he saw the gleaming white hull of the warship.

"A white cruiser," he cried. "Hurrah! It is one of our own vessels, one of Uncle Sam's ships!"

At once all were excited beyond measure. Barney and Pomp cheered wildly.

By this time the Rocket's search light had been seen aboard the warship and a signal was made according to the naval code.

Frank was happily familiar with this and flashed it back. Then the white cruiser slowly approached.

It was not long before the diminutive Rocket was within hailing distance.

"Ahoy!" came from the cruiser's deck, "what craft is that?"

"The submarine boat Rocket from Readestown, U. S. A.," replied Frank. "what ship are you?"

"The United States Ship Raleigh!"

"Good!" cried Frank. "What were you firing at?"

"We are trying to run down the Black Squadron, a gang of pirates."

"Ahoy!" shouted Frank, "lower your gangway. I am coming aboard!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The clank of chains was heard as the warship's gangway went down. Frank turned to Pomp.

"Pomp," he said, "hold the Rocket right here until I return. Barney, you are to go with me. Get out the portable boat."

"All roight, sor."

Clare Ralston now came out on deck and gazed with a thrill at the beautiful white ship as revealed by the glare of the search light.

Barney quickly had the boat ready and Frank leaped into it. They pulled away for the Raleigh.

In a few moments they were at the gangway.

The boat was tethered and then Frank and Barney ascended to the deck.

As they went over the side they were greeted by a tall finely formed man, the foremost of a group of uniformed officers.

"I am Commander Sloane," he said. "Whom have I the honor of meeting?"

"Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown," replied Frank, modestly.

"I thought so," said Commander Sloane, with a warm grip of the hand. "Your fame is well known to us all, Mr. Reade. You are welcome on board the Raleigh."

"Thank you," replied Frank. "Do you know what my mission in these waters is?"

"Perfectly well."

"Ah!"

Frank was surprised. But Commander Sloane laughed. "You see, this is the way of it," he said; "I was at Bombay when a cablegram via Suez came to me from the Secretary of the Navy, ordering me to come down here and give you all the assistance in tracking down the Black Squadron."

Frank's face brightened.

"Ah!" he said; "I understand it all now. But have you seen anything of the pirates?"

"Indeed we have," said Sloane. "Come into my cabin and I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XII.

A HAPPY REUNION—THE END.

FRANK motioned Barney to stay by the gangway, and then followed Commander Sloane into his cabin. The Raleigh was a finely appointed ship.

Sloane indicated a chair and Frank sat down at the cabin table.

The commander sat opposite, and then began:

"Of course, when I received that dispatch from the Secretary I at once started. I cut across to Aden, and there got letters which gave full details, also described your wonderful submarine boat!"

"Just so!" agreed Frank. "You got here quickly?"

"I spared no steam. But I want to ask you. Have you sighted the wretches yet?"

"Yes!" replied Frank.

"Ah, could you get within gunshot?"

"Very easily!"

Sloane stared at him.

"You—haven't had a ruction with any of them yet?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank, "four of them."

"Eh—er—how did you come out?"

"Top of the heap."

"You don't tell me—"

"Yes, I do. Four of the Black Squadron with their rascally crews are at the bottom of the sea."

Sloane gasped. He sprang up from his chair and crossed the cabin floor twice.

"Four!" he exclaimed. "Why, man, that nearly wipes them out! There are but two left!"

"That is true."

For some moments the Raleigh's commander was too astonished to speak. Finally he said:

"By Jove, Reade, you have done a big thing!"

"Well, I don't know."

"Why, I tell you the Tennessee couldn't catch them. Neither could any of the ships of other nations. They could dodge into the

shoal straits and inlets of these archipelagoes and simply laugh at us all."

"You must remember," said Frank, "that my boat is a light draught boat, and also a submarine craft. That is a great advantage."

"Very true. But the invention of the thing! Tell me all about it, Reade. I consider it wonderful!"

With this Frank detailed all the incidents which had befallen him since coming into the Mozambique Channel. Sloane listened with open eyed wonder.

"You are a born fighter," he said, when Frank had finished. "Uncle Sam ought to make an Admiral of you!"

"By the way," said Frank, "you have had some experience with the pirates. Would you mind telling me what it was?"

"Certainly!" replied Sloane. "You see this is how it was. Yesterday morning we sighted a burning ship—two points off our bow—"

"Ah!"

"Just as you did. Well we bore down for her. Only one man was saved, and he is now safe on board. He was drifting on a spar. His story was that he had left Calcutta ten days before on his way to Mozambique aboard the English brig Chester, Captain Aldene. Allan Clark, which was the name of the rescued man, was on his way to Mozambique to intercept an American ship, aboard which was the young lady whom he hoped to make his wife, and—"

Frank sprang up excitedly.

"What did you say his names was?" he cried.

Sloane looked surprised.

"Allan Clark," he replied.

"What a coincidence?" cried the young inventor; "do you remember that I told you of a young lady on board the Santa Clara whom we rescued when that ship went ashore?"

"Yes!"

"Well, her name is Clare Ralston, and she is the lady whom he was to meet and marry!"

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Sloane. "What a romance. Why Clark will be crazy when he hears it!"

"One moment!"

"Well!"

"You have not told me what was the result of your chase of the pirate vessel?"

"Ah, that is easy. We tried to overhaul her in vain. She got away, and we have never got track of her since until this very night, when we chanced to cross her bows back here a few miles. We fired several rounds after her. Whether we hit her or not I do not know, but she made off into shoal water, where we could not pursue her."

"Enough!" said Frank, in an elated voice. "She has run among some of the islands. I will find her and drive her out. You can wait on the outside here and scuttle her, see."

"Just so. But shall we try it in the darkness?"

"No; it wants but an hour or two of daybreak. It will be easy enough to do it then."

"Very good! Your plan is a capital one, and I am glad to co-operate. At this rate the Black Squadron will soon become a thing of the past."

"I think and hope so. Now—"

"What?"

"I am deeply interested in these young lovers. I should like to see them reunited."

"By Jove, so would I!"

"I have a plan!"

"What is it?"

Frank took a pencil and wrote a little comical diagram on a piece of paper. The commander laughed.

"Good!" he declared; "that is capital. I am with you, Mr. Reade. Let the good work go on."

"All right."

Frank went back to the gangway where Barney awaited him.

"Barney," he said.

"Yis, sor."

"I want you to row back to the Rocket and tell Miss Ralston that Commander Sloane wishes to see her immediately on board the Raleigh."

"All roight, sor!"

"Bring her back with you. Tell her it is very important."

"I will, sor."

In a few moments Barney had carried this message to Clare. Wonderingly she prepared to obey.

Meanwhile, Sloane had sent a middy down to Clark's stateroom with a peremptory summons to report instantly to the commander in the chart room. This led off the main cabin.

Wonderingly, young Clark at once obeyed. When he reached the chart room he saw Sloane seated at a table. The commander said sternly:

"Clark, I have some very serious things to say to you. You will oblige me by remaining here under arrest until I return."

The youth's face flushed.

"How is this Captain Sloane?" he began.

But the commander said:

"If you are wise you will make no talk. Simply oblige me this much. I don't wish to iron you to compel you to obey me."

"There is no need of that, sir," said the youth with flashing eyes.

"My word is my bond."

"Then make it good. I will trust you to stay here till I return."

Clark sank into a chair utterly unable to understand it all. At that moment he thought the commander of the Raleigh a very cranky and uncivil man.

Meanwhile Sloane reached the deck just as Clare Ralston came up the gangway. Frank met her and introduced her to the commander. Sloane bowed politely, and said:

"Pray come into the cabin with us, Miss Ralston. I have some very important tidings for you!"

A light like Heaven flashed across her beautiful face.

"Oh," she cried, "is it—is it from Calcutta?"

"Yes," replied Sloane, who could not have told a falsehood in reply to that appeal.

One moment her eyes were fixed searchingly upon Sloane's face. In that instant the shrewd commander afterwards declared that he felt as if his whole life was a printed book revealed to that keen scrutiny. She evidently detected something reassuring for she said no more but followed him into the cabin.

"Pray be seated, Miss Ralston," said Sloane, politely. "I will leave you in Mr. Reade's care a few moments."

Then he vanished into the chart room. Young Clark sat wonderingly and angrily at the table.

"Now, Clark," said Sloane, in a peremptory way. "You are charged with a very serious matter. Is it true?"

"Sir," replied the young man in anger, "I demand an explanation of your insolent words!"

"Certainly," replied Sloane; "just step this way."

"One moment! With what am I charged, sir?"

"With being in love with a very fine young lady," and Sloane pushed him into the cabin with a stifled laugh. Allan Clark stood face to face with Clare Ralston.

The happy scene which followed needs no description. Suffice to say that joyful explanations followed.

It was arranged then and there that the lovers were to remain on board the Raleigh until it should return to Bombay. From thence they could proceed to Calcutta as they might choose.

But their gratitude to Frank Reade, Jr., and Commander Sloane was unbounded.

There was a good laugh over the little practical joke connected with the reunion of the two lovers. Young Clark laughingly declared:

"I must say, commander, that you fooled me completely. I was never so puzzled in my life."

"Nor so angry," said the commander, mischievously.

"That is true," admitted Clark.

But morning was now breaking. Frank and Barney now returned to the submarine boat.

And as the day broke the smoke from the funnels of two other ships appeared on the horizon. They transpired later to be the Italian and French men-o'-war, which had never once got sight of the pirates.

The Rocket once more dodged into the shallow straits, and a startling discovery was made.

There was no call for the firing of another shot in the destruction of the Black Squadron. It was already a thing of the past.

For the pirates, fearing the deadly pursuit of the submarine boat in the morning, and realizing that the jig was up, had beached both their ships and had set fire to them.

The flames were already bursting from port holes and hatches while the black crew themselves were scattering into the safe fastnesses of the islands.

Frank took a brief glance at the burning ships and then returned to the open sea.

When Sloane and the other naval commanders heard the good news they fired a salute and headed for Mozambique.

There a general jubilee followed in which all the vessels in the harbor participated, and the little submarine boat was the hero of the hour.

After the fete was over, Frank went ashore and made his report to the consul. Then he bade adieu to all the friends he had made on board the other ships, and the little Rocket headed for home.

A brief stop was made at Cape Town, and at the Azores. But in due course of time, the Rocket entered the river and ran up to Readstown.

A few hours later Frank sent his report to the Secretary of the Navy and the affair was ended, for he would accept no recompense. And so ended the search for the Black Squadron and the exciting cruise of the Rocket in the Indian Ocean.

And having reached this point in our story we will, with the reader's kind permission, draw the curtain over all.

[THE END.]

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